

Message Text

SECRET

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46-40
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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3730

S E C R E T CAIRO 4458

STADIS//////////

FOR UNDER SECRETARY SISCO FROM AMBASSADOR

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR MARR EG
SUBJECT: FUTURE OF CTF-65

1. WITH SUEZ CANAL SCHEDULED TO BE OPENED ON JUNE 5, QUESTION ARISES WHAT WE SHOULD DO WITH CTF-65 RESIDUAL FORCE. AS YOU KNOW, IT CURRENTLY CONSISTS OF THE OPPORTUNE (A USN SALVAGE SHIP) AND FORCE IS HEADED BY A NAVY CAPTAIN. WE KEPT IT IN THE CANAL AFTER PRIMARY CTF-65 OPERATIONS WERE COMPLETED SOME MONTHS AGO A) AS A DETERRENT TO POSSIBLE HOSTILITIES AND B) TO SHOW OUR CONTINUING INTEREST IN ASSISTING EGYPT. THE EGYPTIAN NAVY HAS FOR SOME TIME FELT IT WAS UNNECESSARY, BUT THE SCA AND FAHMY HAVE WELCOMED ITS RETENTION. THE VESSEL IS CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN CARRYING ON A VARIETY OF MINOR, BUT SIGNIFICANT DEBRIS CLEARANCE AND SALVAGE OPERATIONS FOR THE SCA IN THE CANAL AND PORT TEWFIK/SUEZ AREAS.

2. CTF-65 VESSELS ARE NORMALLY ON STATION SIX MONTHS AT WHICH TIME THEY ARE RELIEVED. OPPORTUNE IS DUE TO BE RELIEVED JULY 22. SHE HAS ENOUGH WORK TO KEEP HER BUSY UNTIL THEN.

3. UNLESS THERE ARE OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS UNKNOWN TO US HERE, I RECOMMEND THAT WE OFFER TO KEEP OPPORTUNE IN THE SUEZ CANAL UNTIL JULY 22, THE DATE OF HER RELIEF, AND THERE-
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AFTER SEND NO NEW SHIP AND CONSIDER OUR SUEZ CANAL CLEARANCE

OPERATIONS TERMINATED. I FAVOR THIS BECAUSE:

A) WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE SCA CHAIRMAN MASHOUR
WOULD WELCOME HAVING THE SHIP A FEW WEEKS LONGER TO FINISH SOME
OF THE TASKS IN WHICH SHE IS CURRENTLY ENGAGED. THERE IS NO END
OF DEBRIS OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER IN THE SUEZ CANAL AND ITS
APPROACHES. I WOULD NOT, OF COURSE, WANT THE OPPORTUNE TO
HANDLE MISSIONS THAT MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO THE MEN OR THE SHIP
AND CONTRARY TO USN PRESENT INSTRUCTIONS;

B) AT THE MOMENT THE FRENCH AND BRITISH HAVE NAVAL
CONTINGENTS OF THREE AND TWO VESSELS, RESPECTIVELY, IN THE CANAL
AREA. THESE ARE MINE HUNTERS FINISHING UP THE JOB. THE
FRENCH IN PARTICULAR HAVE AUGMENTED THEIR FORCE IN THE LAST SEVERAL
WEEKS IN A CLEAR EFFORT TO MAKE A BIG PUBLIC SPLASH AT THE END.
WITHOUT BEING CHAUVINISTIC ABOUT THIS, IT WAS THE USG WHICH FIRST
UNDERTOOK THE SUEZ CANAL CLEARANCE MISSION, AT EGYPTIAN REQUEST,
AND THE USN DID THE BULK OF THE JOB. OURS WAS THE FIRST VESSEL
TO BEGIN THE OPERATION, AND I BELIEVE FOR IMPACT PURPOSES A
USN SHIP RATHER THAN A FRENCH OR BRITISH VESSEL SHOULD BE
THE LAST TO LEAVE.

C) I HAVE BEEN INFORMALLY RPT INFORMALLY ADVISED BY
UNCINCNAVEUR, ADMIRAL SHEAR, THAT HE WOULD SUPPORT RETAINING
THE OPPORTUNE IN THE CANAL AREA UNTIL JULY 22;

D) IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT AID FUNDING FOR THE
VESSEL'S DEPLOYMENT DURING PER PRESENT TOUR ON STATION IS ALREADY
ARRANGED. HENCE NO ADDITIONAL MONETARY OUTLAYS BEYOND
THOSE ALREADY PLANNED ARE NECESSARY.

4. IF THE DEPT CONCURS, I WOULD APPRECIATE BEING
AUTHORIZED A) TO INFORM THE SCA CHAIRMAN THAT, IF HE WISHES, WE
ARE PREPARED TO KEEP OPPORTUNE HERE UNTIL JULY 22 TO ASSIST
HIM IN HIS DEBRIS CLEARANCE OPERATIONS AND B) ADVISE ADMIRAL SHEAR
IN LONDON OF MY RECOMMENDATION AND ASK FOR HIS FORMAL SUPPORT.
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